

## Part 4: Assessment Boards for taught courses

### Section 13: The determination of results - the role of examiners

#### Head of College responsibilities

13.1 The Head of College should ensure that:

- a) teaching staff are familiar with the current definitive course scheme for the course(s) they teach, the course handbook, including the course assessment regulations and the University academic regulations;
- b) appropriate External Examiner nominations for Subject Areas and Progression and Award Boards, hosted by the College, are submitted to the Quality and Standards Office for approval by the appropriate member of the University Executive Board (UEB);

c) modules are allocated to approved External Examiners;

Note: External Examiners are appointed to specific named Subject Areas but will be given responsibility for specified modules, or subjects by the Head of College;

d) External Examiners are inducted to Subject Areas, including providing documents giving details of the syllabuses, assessment requirements, procedures, practices and academic regulations for modules within the remit of the College;

e) External Examiners are inducted to Progression and Award Boards, including providing documents describing the current teaching and assessment scheme and the approved course specific and University assessment regulations;

f) internal and External Examiners are inducted to the role of the External Examiner in the examination team and scrutiny of the marking of internal examiners;

g) internal and External Examiners are informed of the dates of the assessment period and of Assessment meetings of all relevant Progression and Award Boards, normally at the beginning of the academic session and no later than the start of the semester for which the assessments are being completed;

Note: In the case of University-wide Module Boards the Deputy Registrar (Quality and Standards) shall be responsible for nominating and inducting the appropriate External Examiner(s). In the case of collaborative course provision the Liaison Tutor, as the Head of College's nominee, shall be responsible for the undertakings in 13.1 a) – g) above.

#### Internal examiners

13.2 All internal examiners are required to observe the confidentiality of the proceedings of any Progression and Award Board.

13.3 No individual studying for a module or an award being considered by a Progression and Award Board may attend a meeting of that Board.

13.4 Where a student is known to a member of staff other than in their professional capacity, that staff member must declare an interest to the Head of College.

## External Examiners

- 13.5 External Examiners are appointed to credit level 3 and 4 programmes for discrete programmes only i.e. only for awards made at that level or where the modules in question form part of a course delivered in collaboration with another institution.

Note: Staff should refer to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook for information on the External Examiner appointment process.

## Generic responsibilities of External Examiners

- 13.6 All External Examiner(s) must:
- a. observe the confidentiality of all Progression and Award Board proceedings and assessment processes;
  - b. be able to exercise independent judgement and be free from any influence of previous association with the course, the staff, or any of the students;
  - c. be able to compare the performance of students with that of their peers on comparable courses of higher education elsewhere within UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs);
  - d. ensure the assessments are conducted in accordance with the approved course specific and University assessment regulations;
  - e. provide an annual written report to the University on the effectiveness of the assessments and any lessons to be drawn from them in relation to course quality;
  - f. be consulted about proposed changes to the course specific regulations and significant module amendments; and
  - g. report to Academic Council any matters of serious concern arising from the assessments, which put at risk the academic standard of the award.

Note: External Examiners have the right to raise any matter of serious concern with the Vice-Chancellor, if necessary by means of a separate confidential written report. Where an External Examiner has a serious concern relating to systematic failings with the academic standards of a programme(s) and has exhausted all published applicable internal procedures, including the submission of a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor, the External Examiner may invoke procedures with the [Office of Students](#) or inform the relevant Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body.

- 13.7 If an External Examiner is unable to attend the Progression and Award Board the Vice Chancellor, as Chair of Academic Council, may act to ratify all results recommended by the Progression and Award Board, provided that they are satisfied that the assessment process was undertaken appropriately.

## Role of External Examiners in the Subject Area process

- 13.8 External Examiners must be able to monitor the marking standards of the internal examiners by comparison with those of other UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).
- 13.9 The role of Subject Area External Examiners is to judge whether students, as a group, have been rigorously and fairly assessed in relation to the objectives and syllabus of modules and have reached the required academic standard.
- 13.10 The subject specialist External Examiner's primary role is to review the operation of the assessment process and to approve academic standards set by internal examiners. The External Examiner must not be asked to offer assessment judgements in individual cases or to act as a third or additional marker.

13.11 The role of Subject Area External Examiners is to judge whether students, as a group, have been fairly assessed in relation to the objectives and syllabus of modules and have reached the required standard. Such judgements are made in the context of knowledge of standards applied in comparable courses elsewhere and of levels of student attainment in previous years. External Examiners also attest that assessment regulations have been fairly applied ensuring parity of judgement for all students taking a module and comment on the assessment process and procedures. The subject specialist External Examiner's primary role is that of an arbiter of the assessment process and of standards set by internal examiners. The External Examiner must not be asked to offer assessment judgements in individual cases or to act as a third or additional marker.

13.12 Subject Area External Examiners are required to:

- a) visit the University or its collaborative partner normally at least twice each academic session, either to attend Subject Area meetings and/or to view coursework assignments and meet staff and students;
- b) advise on all assessments for work at undergraduate Credit Levels 5 and 6 and postgraduate Credit Level 7;

Note: External Examiners are appointed to Credit Level 3 and 4 programmes for discrete programmes only, i.e. only for awards made at that level.

- c) approve the form and content of examination question papers; and coursework assignments contributing at least 30% of any module assessment;
- d) comment on a representative sample of internally marked work to ensure:
  - i. students are assessed rigorously and fairly in relation to the module syllabus and regulations;
  - ii. students have fulfilled the intended learning outcomes of the module and reached the required academic standard.

- e) provide an overview of the consistency and appropriateness of academic standards of assessment set by the internal examiners;

Note: Where an External Examiner recommends under regulation 12.26 that all marks for that assessment be adjusted by a given margin, or under 12.27 that marking is inconsistent, this must be reported at the relevant Progression and Award Board.

- f) attend Subject Area meetings with other External Examiners appointed to the Subject Area to discuss the assessment practices, academic standards and moderation;
- g) be consulted on any significant proposed changes to course regulations or such minor changes as directly affect students already taking a module; and
- h) submit an annual report that provides clear and informative feedback on:
  - i. the coherence of the policies and procedures relating to External Examiners;
  - ii. their access to and receipt of sufficient evidence and information to enable the role to be fulfilled;
  - iii. whether issues raised in the previous report(s) have been, or are being, addressed to their satisfaction;
  - iv. the design and structure of assessments and if they measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended learning outcomes of the programme(s), whilst being conducted in line with the University's policies and procedures;
  - v. the procedures for assessments and the effectiveness of internal moderation;

- vi. the quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods, including examples of good practice and innovation related to learning, teaching and assessment that could be applied more widely across the University;
- vii. the comparability of academic standards and the achievements of students on similar programmes in other UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs);
- viii. the level of marking and the appropriateness of the academic standards set for the named awards in accordance with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements;
- ix. the students' strengths and weaknesses demonstrated in the assessments, noting possible enhancements to the quality of learning opportunities provided to students;
- x. any issues as specifically required by any relevant professional body; and
- xi. in addition, where an External Examiner has reached their end of tenure and is due to submit their final annual report they should also include an overview of their term of office.

### **Role of External Examiners in the Module Board process**

- 13.13 External Examiners must be able to monitor the marking standards of the internal examiners by comparison with those of other UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).
- 13.14 The role of Module Board External Examiners is to judge whether students, as a group, have been fairly assessed in relation to the objectives and syllabus of modules and have reached the required standard. Such judgements are made in the context of knowledge of standards applied in comparable courses elsewhere and of levels of student attainment in previous years. External Examiners also attest that assessment regulations have been fairly applied ensuring parity of judgement for all students taking a module and comment on the assessment process and procedures. The subject specialist External Examiner's primary role is that of an arbiter of the assessment process and of standards set by internal examiners. The External Examiner must not be asked to offer assessment judgements in individual cases or to act as a third or additional marker.
- 13.15 This role requires Module Board External Examiners to:
- a) visit the University or its collaborative partner normally at least twice each academic session, either to attend Module Board meetings and/or to view coursework assignments and meet staff and students;
  - b) advise on all assessments for work at undergraduate Credit Levels 5 and 6 and postgraduate Credit Level 7;
- Note: External Examiners are appointed to Credit Level 3 and 4 programmes for discrete programmes only, i.e. only for awards made at that level.
- c) approve the form and content of examination question papers; and coursework assignments contributing at least 30% of any module assessment;
  - d) comment on a representative sample of internally marked work to ensure:
    - iii. students are assessed rigorously and fairly in relation to the module syllabus and regulations;
    - iv. students have fulfilled the intended learning outcomes of the module and reached the required academic standard.
  - e) provide an overview of the consistency and appropriateness of academic standards of assessment set by the internal examiners;

Note: Where an External Examiner recommends under regulation 12.26 that all marks for that assessment be adjusted by a given margin, or under 12.27 that marking is inconsistent, this must be reported at the relevant Progression and Award Board.

- f) attend Module Board meetings and formally endorse marks and decisions on reassessment in the case of failed modules;
- g) agree the formal record of Module Board meetings;
- h) be consulted on any significant proposed changes to course regulations or such minor changes as directly affect students already taking a module; and
- i) submit an annual report that provides clear and informative feedback on:
  - xii. the coherence of the policies and procedures relating to External Examiners;
  - xiii. their access to and receipt of sufficient evidence and information to enable the role to be fulfilled;
  - xiv. whether issues raised in the previous report(s) have been, or are being, addressed to their satisfaction;
  - xv. the design and structure of assessments and if they measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended learning outcomes of the programme(s), whilst being conducted in line with the University's policies and procedures;
  - xvi. the procedures for assessments and the effectiveness of internal moderation;
  - xvii. the quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods, including examples of good practice and innovation related to learning, teaching and assessment that could be applied more widely across the University;
  - xviii. the comparability of academic standards and the achievements of students on similar programmes in other UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs);
  - xix. the level of marking and the appropriateness of the academic standards set for the named awards in accordance with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements;
  - xx. the students' strengths and weaknesses demonstrated in the assessments, noting possible enhancements to the quality of learning opportunities provided to students;
  - xxi. any issues as specifically required by any relevant professional body; and
  - xxii. in addition, where an External Examiner has reached their end of tenure and is due to submit their final annual report they should also include an overview of their term of office.

### **Role of External Examiners in Progression and Award Boards**

13.16 The role of Progression and Award Board or Chief External Examiners is to ensure the fair and equitable application of the University's regulations on credit accumulation, and the course-specific regulations for each award, in decisions on the award of qualifications to students. This includes decisions on the progression, the classification of awards (where relevant) and decisions on exclusions. The Chief External Examiner must not be asked to offer assessment judgements in individual cases or to act as a third or additional marker. The Chief External Examiners take part in all work of Progression and Award Boards including the award of intermediate awards, which may include discrete Foundation Certificates. Chief External Examiners are also asked to provide comments to the University on the assessment process and procedures.

Note: Fair treatment includes equitable application of the University's regulations on credit accumulation, as well as the course specific regulations for each award, in decisions

on the award of qualifications to students. This includes decisions on the classification of awards (where relevant) and decisions on exclusions.

- 13.17 At least one approved Chief External Examiner must be in attendance at each Progression and Award Board considering final awards, except where the Board considers referred or deferred assessment and the approved Chief External Examiner(s) has agreed that this may be conducted by correspondence.
- 13.18 Chief External Examiners must provide informative comments and recommendations to the University on the assessment process and procedures.
- 13.19 This role requires Chief External Examiners to:
- a) Attend and endorse decisions made by Progression and Award Boards for progression, final awards and exclusions except for intermediate awards, where, with prior agreement, they may be involved by correspondence;
  - b) contribute to the discussion of cases concerning compliance with course assessment requirements and qualifications;
  - c) agree the formal record of the Progression and Award Board meetings;
  - d) be consulted on any significant proposed changes to course specific assessment regulations and approve any such changes which directly affect students already taking a course; and
  - e) submit an annual report in accordance with the standard format approved by Academic Council commenting on:
    - i. the overall performance of students on each course;
    - ii. the distribution of results across classifications;
    - iii. the implications of results for the course design, or the work of Subject Areas;
    - iv. Progression and Award Board procedures;
    - v. assessment regulations;
    - vi. issues arising from assessments of course schemes as a whole;
    - vii. the conduct of Progression and Award boards.
- 13.20 On rare occasions, a Chief External Examiner may not be prepared to endorse the outcome of the examination process or the decision of a Progression and Award Board. If such occasions do occur, then every attempt should be made to resolve the disagreement through discussion and negotiation. If such attempts are not successful then the Chair of the Progression and Award Board should contact the Deputy Registrar (Quality and Standards), who will review the circumstances and attempt to broker an agreement between the Chair and the Chief External Examiner. Failing agreement, the matter will be referred to the Vice-Chancellor for investigation.

Note: In accordance with section 14, decisions relating to assessment outcomes are made by the majority view of the Progression and Award Board. Therefore, should a Chief External Examiner not be prepared to endorse the decisions of the Progression and Award Board this will not nullify the decisions made by the Progression and Award Board.